

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 MCT-02 SAA-01 SES-02 SSM-03 CIAE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 IO-13 ACDA-12 /097 W
-----073695 040409Z /15

R 031211Z AUG 78

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9052
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PEPR, PLO
SUBJ: VIEWS OF PLO OFFICIALS ON RECENT AREA DEVELOPMENTS

1. REGULAR EMBASSY SOURCE MET WITH PLO OFFICIALS ABD AL-RAZZAK YAHIA, DIRECTOR-GENERAL PLO POLITICAL DEPT; JAMAL SURANI, FORMER PLO REPRESENTATIVE IN CAIRO BEFORE HIS EXPULSION; AND ABD AL-KARIM KARMAH, AN AREA DIRECTOR AT THE POLITICAL DEPT. THEIR VIEWS ON SEVERAL ISSUES FOLLOW.

2. INTRA-PALESTINIAN FIGHTING. ALL WERE CONCERNED BY FATAH-REJECTIONIST BLOODSHED AND SOMEWHAT CRITICAL OF ARAFAT. KARMAH, A FAMOUS PALESTINIAN POET, WAS PARTICULARLY UPSET BY ATTACK ON HANNA MIQBAL, THE PALESTINIAN

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WRITERS' UNION PRESIDENT MAQBAL, WHO IS A FATAH MAN CONSIDERED CLOSE TO FATAH LEFTIST NAJI ALLUSH, AND KARMAH ASSUMED THAT ARAFAT'S PEOPLE WERE BEHIND THE ATTACK. THEY COMPLAINED ABOUT AUTOCRATIC METHODS OF ARAFAT BUT CONCEDED THAT HE HAD SUFFICIENT STRENGTH TO PREVAIL WITHIN PLO COUNCILS. YAHIA SAID THAT ARAFAT ONLY RARELY NOW CONVENED THE PLO EXCOMM AND THEN ONLY TO RATIFY DECISIONS HE HAD ALREADY

REACHED. ARAFAT COULD DO THIS BECAUSE HE DOMINATED FATAH, AND FATAH UNDENIABLE DOMINATED THE MOVEMENT. THEY DID NOT EXPECT CURRENT FATAH-REJECTIONIST FIGHTING TO RESULT IN AN ALL-OUT CONFRONTATION.

3. SYRIAN POLICY IN LEBANON. ALL BELIEVED THAT SYRIA WOULD REMAIN IN LEBANON FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. YAHIA, A FORMER PLA COMMANDER RESPECTED FOR HIS MILITARY COMPETENCE, SPOKE HIGHLY OF THE SYRIAN ARMY CLAIMING THAT IT WAS NOW "THE BEST ARMY IN THE ARAB WORLD." HE SAID THAT SYRIA HAD SUFFICIENT WEAPONS ON HAND THEORETICALLY TO TREBLE THE NUMBER OF MEN IT HAD UNDER ARMS IF IT EVER CHOSE TO MOBILIZE THE COUNTRY'S POOL OF MILITARY AGE MEN AND RESERVES. IF THE SITUATION IN LEBANON BECAME TOO DANGEROUS FOR SYRIA, BETTING WAS THAT SYRIA WOULD PERMIT CIVIL WAR TO REIGNITE ON A LIMITED SCALE AFTER ARMING THE NASCENT ANTI-LEBANESE FRONT COALITION OF KARAMI, FRANGIEH, JUMBLATT, AND THE PPS.

4. FAHD'S VISIT. SURANI SURMISED THAT SADAT HAD LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR SAUDI RECONCILIATION ATTEMPTS BY EXPELLING THE ISRAELI MILITARY DELEGATION AND REFUSING ANOTHER DIRECT MEETING WITH THE ISRAELIS. HE BELIEVED THRUST OF FAHD'S MISSION WAS TO RECONCILE SYRIA AND EGYPT AND PLAY ITS "NATIONAL ROLE" NOW THAT CIRCUMSTANCES PERMITTED.

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5. SYRIAN-FATAH RELATIONS. ALL AGREED THAT A MARKED IMPROVEMENT HAD OCCURRED IN SYRIAN-FATAH RELATIONS AND THAT SYRIA AND THE NON-REJECTIONIST PALESTINIANS WERE NOW CLOSELY COOPERATING. (SEPARATE AIRGRAM FOLLOWS ON THIS SUBJECT.)

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, LIBERATION FRONTS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 aug 1978
Decapton Date: 01 jan 1960
Decapton Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978DAMASC04452
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780320-0497
Format: TEL
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197808104/aaaadiwx.tel
Line Count: 100
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 481f0358-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1551630
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: VIEWS OF PLO OFFICIALS ON RECENT AREA DEVELOPMENTS
TAGS: PEPR, PINT, SY, LE, PLO
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/481f0358-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014